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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7252
INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0660
RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN 0066
RUEHN/AMEMBASSY OSLO 0084
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0069
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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000711

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PARIS FOR ZEYA; LONDON FOR TSOU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/12/2015

TAGS: PGOV PREL SY

SUBJECT: SCANDINAVIANS MOVING QUIETLY TO REPAIR RELATIONS
WITH SARG

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Stephen A. Seche, per 1.4 b,d.

¶1. (C) Summary: Nearly three weeks after three Scandinavian embassies in Damascus suffered moderate to severe damage in SARG-sanctioned demonstrations to protest the caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed in European media, it appears that all three governments are moving quietly to repair relations with the Syrian regime, restore their damaged buildings to working order, and return to work. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Charge spoke with both the Swedish and Norwegian ambassadors this week and, while each remains troubled by the events of February 4, neither expressed a desire to sever ties with the SARG, nor did they offer any indication that such a course of action was being contemplated by their respective governments. In addition, the Danish Ambassador, who left Syria to return to Copenhagen shortly after the demonstrations for security reasons, apparently is preparing to return presently.

¶3. (C) Both the Swedish and Norwegian ambassadors told the Charge that the SARG has agreed to pay compensation for the damages to their Missions and that they are finalizing an inventory of damage and expenses. (Note: We presume this offer of compensation extends to the Danes, as well.) The Swedish Ambassador noted that she and her staff returned to their moderately damaged offices just days after the demonstrations, and have been working from that location ever since. She noted that, in addition to a large quantity of broken eggs, glass and rocks she discovered in her office that overlooked the street where the demonstrators gathered, she also found a Molotov cocktail that apparently had failed to ignite.

¶4. (C) The Norwegian Ambassador, whose Mission was gutted by fire, said that its secure communications equipment and cable traffic had not been compromised and had been returned to Oslo recently. He noted that the Syrian government has made offices available to him in the Meridien Hotel in the meantime. It also is permitting him to work extensively from the Norwegian Consulate in Beirut during this period, although he must travel to the Embassy in Amman to send and receive secure communications. In response to a question regarding the possible move of his Embassy from Damascus to Beirut as an expression of displeasure with the SARG, the Ambassador said that such a move was very unlikely, since the government in Damascus would never accredit him in Syria in that case, and he believes (and presumably his government

agrees) that his ability to work here is too important to relinquish.

¶15. (C) We understand that the Danish Ambassador, who left Syria less than a week after the demonstrations for security reasons, is poised to return presently. One Danish staffer remained in Damascus to pay salaries of local staff and attend to any other requirements. (Note: The Ambassador also left his dog behind, suggesting that his absence was never intended to be permanent.)

¶16. (C) Comment. It seems clear from our conversations with the Scandinavian diplomats here that their governments have no intention of recalling them or otherwise putting relations with the SARG on ice in the wake of the violent demonstrations earlier this month. They seem intent on restoring their buildings - and their government's relations with the SARG. - to something resembling the state of affairs that prevailed the morning of February 4, before the demonstrators took to the streets with SARG encouragement and support. They clearly want to remain involved in Syria, and engaged in efforts to encourage internal reforms and end regional conflicts. One even suggested that they use the perceived SARG desire to make amends with their governments as leverage to try and achieve some traction for the Arab-Israeli peace process. End comment.

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